

Overview and Scrutiny Issues

1. A Snapshot of some of the Scrutiny Work currently being undertaken

Corporate Scrutiny Committee

Since the report to Full Council in October the Corporate Scrutiny Committee has met on two occasions. The October meeting received a report on the Budget Outturn at the Half-Year Stage and on progress against the Corporate Plan. The Committee also received an update on the Capita Resourcing contract related to the Essex County Council New Starters Survey.

The November meeting received an update on Phase II of Transformation. The Committee also considered Absence Management data throughout the Authority. The Procurement Task and Finish Group established by the Committee in July 2013 has met on three occasions and the November meeting also received an interim report from the Task and Finish Group. The Group intends to present its final report and recommendations to the January 2014 meeting of the Committee. Evidence has been received, to date, from the County Council's Commercial Director, Essex Cares Limited, the Essex Federation of Small Businesses, the County Council's Supplier Working Group and the Voluntary and Community Sector. The Cabinet Member for Transformation and Corporate Services will be invited to attend one of the future evidence sessions prior to the final report being prepared.

The future workload of the Committee includes a review of Broadband coverage in the County, Social Impact Bonds, and the Investment Strategy, Health and Safety at Work; plus the standing items related to the budget, the corporate plan and Transformation II, including Property Transformation.

Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Since its last report the Committee has considered a report, and met with officers, from the East of England Ambulance Service. The Trust had developed and published a single action plan that incorporated actions from the Trust's own earlier Turnaround Plan, the recommendations from an independent Governance review commissioned by the NHS Trust Development Authority, and the Care Quality Commission report issued earlier in the year. The Plan recognised that EEAST needed to improve its services to patients and build better staff engagement and empowerment. The focus of the Plan was on seven areas: Leadership, Our People (staff and volunteers), Finance, Communication and engagement, Trust Culture, Processes, and Services. The three key challenges in Essex were the recruitment of staff, increasing capacity and managing demand.

The Committee has also considered a report from the People Commissioning Directorate reviewing the performance of the South and North East Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trusts and has discussed the Trusts' Annual Reports with their officers. The Partnership Agreements delegate the County Council's statutory responsibilities for assessment and care management for people with enduring mental

health needs in an integrated way with mental health services. Both Trusts had achieved their performance targets whilst contributing to the County Council financial efficiency targets and reducing the County Council contribution to them by 17% over the last five years.

An update on recent regulatory developments at Colchester Hospital University NHS Foundation Trust (CHUFT) has also been presented to the Committee. The Chief Inspector of Hospitals had recommended that CHUFT be placed into special measures as a result of serious concerns about the quality of some services for cancer patients. The concerns and the recommendation had been referred to Monitor, the sector regulator for health services in England. The Committee is mindful of the need to avoid intrusion on the work being undertaken by CQC and Essex Police but will be reviewing the Trust's prioritised action plan and then determining further scrutiny activity.

The Committee has also noted a report on the development of Healthwatch Essex. At the invitation of the Committee, HWE has been invited to nominate a permanent representative to sit with the Committee. HWE has 4.5 members of staff and is significantly supported by volunteers, currently numbering around 40. HWE had representation on approximately 92% of health boards, panels and forums in the County but as yet do not have strong representation on comparable social care bodies. HWE is currently engaged on two large research projects looking at unpaid carers and discharges from hospital.

Place Services & Economic Growth

Since its report to Council in October the Committee's work programme has to some extent been focussing upon the consideration of call ins rather than taking forward any proposed task and finish group activity.

At its October committee meeting it focussed upon decision FP/282/08/13 on the Local Highway Panel (LHP) Budget Allocations as two members had called in that decision. It was a useful session as Councillor Bass, the Cabinet Member, was able to reassure the Committee on the rationale for his decision. He set out the capital and revenue budgets for LHPs for 2013/14. He explained that an under-spend in the capital budget allocation for 2012/13 meant that £7.3m was re-profiled into the current year 2013/14. A further £8m allocation was made for the current year totalling £15.3m for 2013/14. The expected outturn is now estimated as £10.7m, leaving an underspend of £4.6m that was being reallocated to other Highways Schemes, which the service had the capacity to deliver.

The Cabinet Member advised that the aim is to strengthen support to the LHPs with officers to augment with engineers to give advice and monitor delivery of schemes. Guidance had also been issued to LHPs to help ensure effective delivery of schemes. The advice given to LHPs was to determine schemes for 2014/15 by March to ensure a realistic prospect of delivery and to invest more in scheme preparation and surveys etc.

In response to the issues raised by those Members who had called in the decision, the Cabinet Member confirmed that more schemes had been delivered this current year than the previous year. There was no intention to buy in consultancy for scheme design.

As a result of the debate both Call Ins were withdrawn.

At the same meeting the Committee received an overview of the Essex Parking Partnerships, and it was agreed that a scrutiny review will be taken forward in the New Year along the lines of 'Are the original objectives of the Parking Partnerships being delivered, and what lessons have been learned to inform more effective partnership working in the future?'

At the time of writing this report arrangements were being finalised for the Part Night Lighting Task and Finish Group to begin its activity, together with work on other investigations including the Financial Inclusion project. However, progress on moving the Committee work programme forward has been slow as resources have had to be directed to the various notifications of call of decisions received.

People & Families Scrutiny Committee

Since the report to Full Council in October the People & Families Scrutiny Committee met on Thursday, 14 November 2013 when it dealt with six call-ins of the decision to discontinue The Deanes School, Thundersley (FP/239/06/13). In an unprecedented move the Committee voted to refer the decision back to the decision-taker (The Cabinet). The Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning and other Cabinet and other Cabinet Members present at the Committee heard additional testimonies and evidence. They will also have been fully aware of the conviction of the Committee that there is no overwhelming evidence to close the School. The issue has raised the profile of Scrutiny both inside and outside the Council considerably.

In response to the six call-ins the Cabinet Member countered that the scrutiny process had not been disregarded or ignored, he had just disagreed with its conclusions. The recommendations of the Task and Finish Group had been considered and balanced against other recommendations received.

The Committee is holding a previously unscheduled meeting on 5 December 2013 to pick up those items which were not dealt with at the 14 November meeting due to time constraints following the call-ins. Other issues that will be dealt with on that date include Home to School Transport, the Youth Strategy and the consultation on Increasing Independence for Adults with Disabilities.

Members undertook a site visit to the Contact Centre at Essex House, Colchester on Friday, 1 November to experience an informative session on both Children and Adult Social Care from inception of a case with an initial telephone call to the Contact Centre through to a care package being formulated. Members had the opportunity to listen to calls coming in and understand first-hand the work that is undertaken to ensure quality outcomes for service users.

Members of the Committee have engaged with the Cabinet of the Young Essex Assembly to seek ways in which the Assembly can be engaged in Scrutiny activity at the County Council. One proposal is to hold a Scrutiny Committee meeting on a date, or at a time, when the young people are able to attend. Another way is to use the young members as witnesses at evidence gathering sessions on issues relevant to them, or co-opt members of the YEA onto a Task and Finish Group.

The future workload of the Committee includes the continuation of work commenced under the previous Children and Young People and Community and Older People Policy & Scrutiny Committees such as the Special Educational Needs and Disability Strategy, the Carers Strategy, Ageing Well and Sensory Services Review. Other issues the Committee will be considering will be Children in Care (a Task and Finish Group has been established and the work scoped under the guidance of South East Employers); and requesting a report from *Essex Cares*.

Scrutiny Board

It was reported to the last meeting that the Board had organised an externally facilitated training session for Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of Scrutiny Committees to enable Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen to understand and develop the leadership role of overview and scrutiny; and to consider all aspects of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman's role in order to support improvement and develop performance. This session was held on 17 October and identified a number of initiatives, on which the Board is now working, to improve the Council's scrutiny work. These include a regular newsletter to all members and enhanced scrutiny webpages.

The Board has also received briefings on Local Highways Panels and the *Your Essex, Let's Talk programme*. It intends to give further consideration in due course to the possible scrutiny of these initiatives. It also continues to review the Essex Scrutiny Handbook. This is now available on the Council's website and brings together for the use of Members, officers and partners a wide range of guidance and good practice relating to scrutiny.

Simon Walsh
Chairman of the Scrutiny Board